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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
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THE VIET MINH CAMPAIGN IN CENTRAL LAOS

The Viet Minh forces involved in the present offensive in central Laos consist of elements of two divisions, the 304th and the 325th, and are believed to total at present about nine battalions or 7,000 men.

Latest information states that the French have abandoned the town of Thakhek, on the Mekong river border of Thailand. Six enemy battalions comprising the main task force of this offensive have occupied Thakhek. Two more Viet Minh battalions, not yet in contact with the French, are expected to operate parallel to and somewhat to the north of the main body, and a third force of one battalion is expected to move west from the Dong Hoi area, south of the main body.

Two small French posts, Ban Hang Kane and Ban Na Phao, both east of Thakhek, have fallen to the main Viet Minh force.

Some French and native forces are now regrouping at Savan-nakhet, on the Mekong about 50 miles south of Thakhek.

The French communications along the Mekong river from Saigon to northern Laos are now intercepted by the Viet Minh. It is believed, however, that French forces in northern Laos can be supplied by air. French forces in northwest Tonkin are supplied by air from Hanoi and Haiphong.

Several thousand refugees from the Thakhek area have reportedly crossed the border into Thailand, and the Thai government, as during the Viet Minh's April offensive, has declared a state of emergency in its northern and northeastern provinces. The Thai government is greatly concerned over the possibility of border incursions in this area, where there are "thousands" of Vietnamese supposedly sympathetic to the Viet Minh cause. However, Bangkok has reinforced Thai troops in this region and these forces are believed sufficient to contain any attempted Viet Minh invasion by the forces now in the Thakhek area, even if such an invasion were contemplated which seems unlikely.

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Thai concern over this threatening situation has been heightened by a Moscow broadcast, which attacks Thailand as a pawn of the United States and a base for transshipping supplies to the French forces in Indochina.

The major Viet Minh forces, numbering six divisions, are still in Tonkin. Four of these are in a position to move quickly into northern Laos. As yet there is no information as to whether they will undertake such an operation or concentrate on French forces in northwest Tonkin.

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This thrust gives the Viet Minh a tactical advantage and a victory which can be exploited for propaganda purposes, particularly in Paris, at a time when the French and Vietnamese governments are handicapped by political changes. The immediate political implications are more important than the military and on the military side the threat to communications along the Mekong river is the most serious aspect of the situation.

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